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State Superintendent of Public Instruction



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To: Charter School Principals

From: William L. Padia, Director
Policy and Evaluation Division

Subject: **Charter Schools and Alternative Accountability**

The purpose of this memorandum is to: 1) update you on developments in the Alternative Accountability System; 2) provide the definition of alternative schools adopted by the State Board of Education (SBE) for the purpose of the Public Schools Accountability Act; and 3) offer you the opportunity to formally request inclusion in the Alternative Accountability System if your school meets the criteria adopted by the SBE.

Last January the California Department of Education (CDE) began a new era in educational accountability with the release of the *Academic Performance Index (API) Reports* for schools. These reports were mandated by the Public Schools Accountability Act (PSAA) of 1999. All Charter schools with at least 100 valid Stanford 9 test scores were included in this main API Accountability System and received 1999 APIs along with 1999 API Reports.

The PSAA also stipulates that an Alternative Accountability System be developed for certain schools including: small schools, those with fewer than 100 pupils; schools under the jurisdiction of a county board of education or a county superintendent of schools; community day schools; and alternative schools, including continuation high schools. In July 2000, the SBE approved a report on the development and implementation of an Alternative Accountability System from the Advisory Committee for the Public Schools Accountability Act. Excerpts from this report are attached, and the full report is available on the Internet at:

<<http://www.cde.ca.gov/psaa/board/july00/drftpsaatosbe.htm>>

Charter schools serving traditional student populations with fewer than 100 valid Stanford 9 test results will be held accountable under the "Small Schools Model." In the Small Schools Model, a small-school API with a special asterisk designation will be provided to schools having students with 11 to 99 valid Stanford 9 scores. The asterisk is designed to acknowledge the greater statistical uncertainty of an API based on fewer than 100 scores. The small-school API will be reported beginning with the base year 2000 API. Very small schools having fewer than 11 valid Stanford 9 scores will participate in the Alternative Schools Accountability Model, which will employ a multiple-indicator reporting system.

Charter schools that meet the definition of alternative schools as adopted by the SBE may elect to participate in the Alternative Schools Accountability Model whatever their size and number of valid test results.

For purposes of the Alternative Accountability System, alternative schools are defined in terms of the student populations they serve. Specifically, alternative schools are defined as schools that serve a majority of students who are:

- identified as disabled
- classified as being at high risk for behavioral or educational failure*
- expelled or under disciplinary sanction
- wards of the court
- pregnant and/or parenting
- recovered dropouts.

When completing the attached form, you are encouraged to carefully consider the stated purpose of your school and your student population in light of the alternative school definition. **Unless your Charter school currently serves a majority of students in the populations listed above, your school will participate in the main API Accountability System or the Small Schools Model and receive an API or a small-school API, depending on the number of valid test scores.** On the other hand, if your school meets the definition of an alternative school for the purposes of the Alternative Accountability System, you may elect to have your school included in the Alternative Schools Accountability Model. Once your school elects to participate in this model, it must continue to do so for at least three years. **It is important for you to consider that only schools in the main API Accountability System are currently eligible for the cash awards and the interventions programs.** However, it is possible that future legislation will provide funding for awards and interventions for schools in the Alternative Schools Accountability Model.

On the enclosed form please indicate your choice to: 1) receive an API or small-school API with a special asterisk designation; or 2) be held accountable under the Alternative Schools Accountability Model. Please FAX the form to CDE by September 7, 2000. If this form is not received by September 7, your school will be in the main API Accountability System and receive the 1999-2000 API Growth Report this September; or be in the Small Schools Model and receive a small-school API in January 2001, as appropriate.

If you have questions regarding the Alternative Accountability System, please contact Sue Bennett in the Educational Options office at (916) 322-5015. If you have questions regarding the form, please contact the Educational Planning and Information Center (EPIC) at (916) 657-2273.

*This refers to the characteristics of students served by continuation schools, opportunity schools, community day schools, and county court and community schools as distinguished from students served by schools that are low-performing.

Excerpts from the July, 2000 Report on the Development and Implementation of an Alternative Accountability System

From the Advisory Committee for the Public Schools Accountability Act

The Alternative Accountability System includes three models:

Small Schools Model – A small-schools Academic Performance Index (API) will be calculated for schools with 11 to 99 valid test scores. This API will be reported with an asterisk denoting that it is for a small school.

Special Education Centers Model – No additional accountability measures for special education schools and centers will be developed at this time. The model will rely on the current Quality Assurance Process, the annual Individualized Education Program review, and other accountability processes currently in place. The State Board of Education (SBE) will review this model next summer to see if adjustments are necessary.

Alternative Schools Accountability Model – Alternative schools—like all schools—must seek to meet state standards of learning and achievement. The committee finds that the accountability model for alternative schools must directly acknowledge the fact that schools serving a majority of students who are at high risk for behavioral or educational failure, expelled or under disciplinary sanction, wards of the court, pregnant and/or parenting, or recovered dropouts must also meet the challenge of addressing personal and social issues that confront these students and interfere with their abilities to reach grade level standards. Accountability that accurately reflects the growth of students enrolled in alternative schools must be based on multiple indicators of progress reflecting academic performance as well as other aspects of growth. Moreover, it must be based on data for students enrolled for a minimum period required for consistent delivery of instruction and must reflect the progress of those students during the time they were enrolled in the school.

Small schools with ten or fewer valid Stanford 9 test scores must also be included in the Alternative Schools Accountability Model.

The accountability model for alternative schools can best be addressed by adopting a multiple-indicator system that requires schools to report STAR test results as well as achievement of goals for growth on additional indicators of readiness for learning, academic achievement, and school completion. Key elements of the model are as follows:

- A list of indicators, including STAR results, approved by the SBE.* This list may identify one or more required indicators and also permit selection of a required number of indicators from two or more categories.
- Minimum levels of growth on STAR results and other indicators approved by the SBE.
- Indicators selected locally and approved by local boards to be tracked and reported for three years. Selected indicators should be appropriate to the population served.
- Data reported to local boards and CDE by all participating schools.
- Achievement of goals on STAR and on each of the state-approved indicators evaluated by CDE.

*Proposed indicators for this system will be presented to the SBE in January 2001.